

PEGGY WILLIAMS

14th September 1916 - 15th November 2003



The Greatest Treasure

Nanette Walsh writes this obituary:

On the 15th of November the international Alexander community lost one of its most revered teachers. Dedicated to Alexander's work for over 50 years, Peggy Williams died at the age of 87 in London.

Peggy was born into the Goldstone family in Manchester during the first World War. The fifth of six children, at birth she was, in her own words, "small enough to fit in a pint jug of milk ... very much the runt of the family." Delayed schooling and an adverse and troubled relationship with her mother made for a difficult childhood. When she was 19 her father was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and the family moved to Brighton by the sea. She remained there nursing her father until he died in 1938. Soon afterwards Peggy left home, married Louis Nixon and moved to London, where she lived for the rest of her life.

After the end of World War II, her husband, afflicted with a stammer, sought the help of F. Mathias Alexander. When he was unable to pursue his own course of study, he sent his wife along instead. This meeting of a fearful young Jewish woman, with little formal education, and the Tasmanian born originator of the Technique that bears his name, proved to be an event of exceptional good fortune. Peggy found in Alexander a method, a genius and a mentor that gave her the means to transform her pain and realize her unique potential. She recalled being given "the greatest jewel – the greatest treasure that I could ever receive."

In the autumn of 1947, Peggy entered F.M.'s course. Her training lasted over seven years. Technically she completed her training in 1951 as Alexander's stroke had resulted in all students on the course being given an additional year. However Peggy did not feel ready to teach and F.M. kindly granted her another year. At the end of that year she remained at Ashley Place to lend a hand; and she continued to do so for yet three more years. In February 1955, Walter Carrington and John Skinner persuaded her to take her certificate. After Alexander's death in October, Peggy stayed on to assist Walter with the course.

Peggy's first marriage ended in 1958. In 1960 she married Rex Williams. That same year she joined the move to 18 Lansdowne Road, where the training course continued under the name of The Constructive Teaching Centre. Sadly Rex Williams died in 1968 after only 8 years of a very happy marriage. In 1972 Peggy moved to North London and slowly began to take leave of Lansdowne Road. She spent most of the last thirty odd years of her life teaching from her light-filled, though somewhat reclusive roost atop the hills of Highgate.

Peggy's exemplary contributions were recognized outside the Alexander world in 1993 when she was honoured as one of the most notable British women of the year in the book *The Best of British Women*. In 1999 Peggy took an uncharacteristic interest in the writing of her biographical memoir. "I was really damaged when I started but I had a deep yearning to change," she said. "That's the most important thing; one's willing and wishing and yearning to change. That is why the Technique is evolutionary, because it gives you the chance. This must give hope to other people!"

In the summer of 2000 a celebration was held at Lansdowne Road to celebrate Peggy's 45th year of teaching. Peggy was "grateful beyond words." Before the party she shared that "Of course, the real true fact is that I do owe what I am today, apart from my own determination, to Walter and his belief in me and his encouragement ... because without his help I'd have given up. That is for sure."

At the celebration Walter Carrington introduced Peggy saying that "No other teacher has really done what Peggy did." Later he expanded on his tribute saying that "She is very much a feeling creature," and he thought that to be "... a good thing, not a bad thing." Indeed Peggy's strong emotional nature was crucial in her ability to work with such clarity and understanding and made her perspective on Alexander's work deeply important.

Peggy was also renowned for the remarkable skill and clarity of her hands. The precision of her touch was such that it is known to have confounded the London police. Perplexed during the investigation of a burglary at her apartment they queried her profession: most unusually, her fingerprints left no smudge.

Describing an Alexander lesson, Peggy once commented "It really is blessed isn't it?" And it was not unusual for a pupil under her hands to feel exactly that. In fact, esoteric books – gifted to her from pupils – lined her bookshelves. Still, Peggy kindly asserted a disinterest in spiritual endeavours. "People keep giving me those books because I think they think I'm rather holier than whatnot. I try to disabuse them of it and I sometimes spring on them the fact that I bet on horses!"

At the age of 85, Peggy kept a modest daily teaching schedule albeit seven days a week. Over the last couple of years as she became increasingly weak, many of her students were simply welcomed for tea; and then having had a bit of a chat she might happily offer instead to "do some work". Either way, Peggy Williams' keen insight and uncommon presence often left one feeling remarkably more alive just for having had the pleasure of her company.

On the 18th of November, a funeral service led by Rabbi Jeffrey Newman was held in Golders Green; it was followed by a cremation. She is survived by her brother David Goldstone of Ontario, Canada.

Nanette Walsh completed her training with the American Center for the Alexander Technique in 1995. She currently lives and teaches in New York City. She is the author of the upcoming biographical memoir on Peggy Williams.
